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ABSTRACT

Empowerment implies that student teachers become more confident and autonomous learners, with more responsibility for, and control over, their learning. Traditionally, student teachers have been a disempowered group, as teacher educators have tended to emphasize the voice of experts rather than novices and the voice of theory rather than practice. Twelve student teachers in the Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) program at Macquarie University (New South Wales, Australia) described reactions to the first year of their preservice program. Reactions were analyzed using M. Belenky et al.'s metaphor of voice as an indicator of empowerment, with five broad epistemological perspectives: silence (denial of voice), received knowledge (reliance on voices of external authorities), subjective knowledge (tuning into one's intuitive voice), procedural knowledge (faith in the voice of reason), and constructed knowledge (integration of voices). The voices of the student teachers varied enormously in their perception of their ability to take responsibility for their learning. These voices must be heard. Yet, simply listening will not be enough. Teacher educators must reconsider their practices in light of what student teachers are saying. Unless teacher educators are prepared to reconceptualize their roles and expectations, there is little likelihood that preservice programs will lead to development of autonomous, empowered, and reflective student teachers able to cope with the complexities of teaching. (Contains 34 references.) (JDD)

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EMPOWERING BEGINNING STUDENT TEACHERS: IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATORS

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INTRODUCTION

Concerns about the efficacy of preservice programs in preparing student teachers for the complexities of teaching have led to considerable reconceptualisation of teacher education programs in recent years (Valli, 1992; Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1991; Clift, Houston & Pugach, 1990). Increasingly, models of imparted learning underlying most traditional preservice programs are giving way to an emphasis on constructed learning in which student teachers are encouraged to develop their own understanding of what it means to be a teacher. The widespread interest in reflective practices, for example, is indicative of this trend. An implicit assumption underlying these new directions in teacher education is that they enable student teachers to become more empowered learners.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BECOME EMPOWERED?

E*mpowerment* is one of those problematic notions ascribed a wide range of meanings (Griffin, 1992; Prawat, 1991). To some, for example, it is a process of individual transformation; to others it is a process of overcoming collective disenfranchisement in order to achieve socio-political reform . In this paper, *empowerment* is conceptualised in terms of professional and personal growth. *Empowerment* involves student teachers becoming become more confident and autonomous learners, with more responsibility for, and control over, their learning. Inherent in *empowerment* is the development of voice. *Voice* implies a strong sense of identity and purpose; an ability to express ideas and convictions coherently; an expectation of being listened to. In short, *voice* is power (Cortazzi, 1993; Hogan & Clandinin, 1993; McElroy-Johnson, 1993; Britzman, 1991; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986).

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Debates about empowerment are not confined to its meaning. The process by which empowerment occurs is also disputed. Some take the view that it inevitably involves a realignment of the pre-existing balance of power (eg. Griffin, 1992). In contrast, others (eg.Hogan & Flather, 1993) argue that power cannot be "given" or "taken", but develops within the context of a relationship, and that consequently, the quality of the relationship determines the potential for empowerment. The implications for teacher educators arising from each of these perspective are very different. If empowerment is a function of a positive and enriching relationship, then mutual empowerment of student teachers and teacher educators appears possible. On the other hand, if power is a finite commodity, teacher educators will need to relinquish some degree of power if student teachers are to become more empowered.

Traditionally, student teachers have been a disempowered group. Until recently, their voices have rarely been heard. Teacher educators have tended to emphasise the voice of the expert rather than the novice, and the voice of theory rather than practice (Hogan & Clandinin, 1993). Similarly, research into teacher education, in common with much educational research, has often silenced the voices of those it studies and amplified the voices of researchers (McWilliam, 1993). However, a number of recent studies (eg Johnston, 1994; Knowles, Cole & Presswood,1994; Clandinin, Davies, Hogan & Kennard, 1993; Renwick & Vize, 1990, 1992, 1993) have focussed on the experience of learning to teach from the perspective of student teachers, suggesting that more attention is beginning to be paid to the voices of student teachers. This paper adds to that literature by providing an outlet for the voices of a group of beginning student teachers as they describe their reactions to the first year of their preservice program. In addition, it uses the conceptual framework developed by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberg & Tarule (1986) to explore the student teachers' epistemological perspectives, as a means of gaining insight into their empowerment as learners.

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The paper is based on some of the findings from the first year of a three year longitudinal study into aspects of the professional development of a group of student teachers. The twelve student teachers who volunteered to collaborate in the study are enrolled in the Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) program at Macquarie University. They vary considerably in their socio-cultural and ethnic backgrounds, age, past academic performance, fields of previous study and employment, political orientations and life

experiences. Although the researcher is a member of faculty, it is anticipated that at no stage of the study will she assess any of these student teachers.

These student teachers are part of the first cohort enrolled in the BEd program introduced by the Institute of Early Childhood in 1993. This program differs substantially from the previous progam in that it involves fewer contact hours and more emphasis on independent study. Student teachers are therefore expected to become more independent and autonomous learners. In an attempt to overcome the traditional dichotomy between theory and practice, the practicum component no longer "stands alone", but is embedded within a sequence of core units, known as Guided Practice. One of the aims of Guided Practice is to foster reflective practices.

In the first year of Guided Practice, student teachers visit daycare centres and K-2 classrooms, and undertake a two week preschool practicum. Tutorials focus on the identification and discussion of personally significant incidents and issues arising from field visits, course reading, and life experiences. Student teachers are encouraged to consider the interplay between beliefs, reactions and practice. They are expected to explore alternative options and to consider possible implications. Underlying first year Guided Practice units is an emphasis on the development of communication and planning skills.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative research design to provide a flexible framework for the collection of rich descriptive data to represent the multiplicity of perspectives held by the participants (Bogdan and Biklin, 1992; Le Compte, Millroy & Preissle, 1992). Indepth interviews conducted on a 1:1 basis constituted the main source of data. Additional sources included representations of thoughts and ideas through drawings, lists of key words, or concept maps; reflective episodes recorded in practicum folders; and small group interviews. Journals were also used, where student teachers kept these of their own accord, and were willing to share them with the researcher.

Participants were interviewed twice each semester. Interviews were loosely structured to enable the student teachers to discuss the experiences and incidents most significant to them (Carter, 1994; Tripp, 1993), and varied in duration from thirty minutes to an hour. Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. Transcripts were returned to student teachers, with an invitation to amend if needed in order to more accurately reflect their thoughts and feelings at the time of the interview. Following procedures advocated by Bogdan and Bicklin

(1992), copies of transcripts, and other data, were cut and pasted onto cards to facilitate analysis.

The data was analysed in terms of emerging themes (Van Manen, 1990; McCracken,1988), and conceptual categories arising from Belenky et al.'s (1986) seminal study of women's epistemological perspectives. Using the metaphor of *voice* as an indicator of empowerment, Belenky et al identify five broad epistemological perspectives: *silence* (denial of voice), *received knowledge* (reliance on the voices of external authorities), *subjective knowledge* (tuning into one's intuitive voice), *procedural knowledge* (faith in the voice of reason), and *constructed knowledge* (integration of voices). They claim these perspectives are particularly relevant, although not exclusive, to women. A brief description of each perspective is included in the presentation of findings.

Belenky et al.'s (1986) framework was selected for a number of reasons. It seemed particularly appropriate given the high proportion of female student teachers in early childhood teacher education programs. In addition, their emphasis on voice as an indicator of empowerment was relevant to current literature on student teacher empowerment (eg Johnston, 1994; Knowles & Cole, 1994; Clandinin, Davies, Hogan & Kennard, 1993;). Finally, their conceptualisation provided a more holistic way of exploring the complexities of professional and personal development than most alternative frameworks (eg. Sparks-Langer, Simmons, Pasch, Colton & Starko, 1990; Kitchener, 1986).

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The student teachers returned consistently to a number of recurring personally relevant themes. Themes capture the essence of experience. Arising from the desire to find meaning, they also represent meaning (Van Manen, 1990). As *voice* and *meaning* are inextricably linked (Britzman, 1991), it seemed best to portray the student teachers' voices as they explored a *personal theme*. Their voices are presented through partial profiles of a number of student teachers. When selecting which student teachers to profile, a range of epistemological perspectives was sought.

Michaela: Emerging From Silence

Belenky et al. (1986) use the term *silence* to describe the absence of *voice* which characterises disempowerment. They suggest that for those who are silent, words are perceived as destructive weapons, rather than tools for creating or transmitting knowledge.

Consequently, a state of silence implies a lack of dialogue, either with oneself or others. Thus silence impedes learning and the development of understanding. In their study, Belenky et al. found no university students locked into a world of silence, and that was so for this study, also. Michaela, however, had experienced the isolation of silence, and was still in the process of breaking free.

Michaela has completed a TAFE Associate Diploma in an area unrelated to early childhood, and has worked for several years. Although she is in her mid twenties, her lack of confidence gives the impression of someone much younger. Michaela explained, however, that recently she has come to feel *"more capable within myself, more confident"*, and indeed *"a different person"* from when she was younger. Michaela grew up in a family headed by a father who expected her *"to be seen but not heard"*. She described how: *"I wasn't allowed to express myself. If I opened my mouth, my father would say 'I don't want to hear!"*. She recalled her father *"standing over me while I was speaking on the phone to see if I was speaking correctly"* and noted that *"even now, I don't like talking on the phone when my father is around"*. Lack of voice and enforced silence in Michaela's early years appear to have led to a sense of isolation and relatively low self esteem.

Michaela explained that establishing close relationships with others has been difficult for her: *"When I was younger, I couldn't get myself into a group. I wasn't confident in speaking up for myself"*. At school, she felt isolated, sensing that *"not many teachers cared very much about me"*. Later, Michaela left a job she had held for several years because the people with whom she worked were *"unapproachable"*. It was not until she started working as a nanny that Michaela began to overcome her feelings of isolation. She regards the father of the family for whom she now works as valuable role model. Through him, Michaela finds she is learning how to interact more effectively, especially in relation to children. She described how: *"He is a 'teacher' to me. I watch how he relates to his children - his close relationship and his bonding with them. He's shown me how to get down to their level, and not to stand over them"*. Michaela commented that the children whom she nannies *"have taught me to be more caring, more flexible, more accepting ... and not to get angry so quickly, but to think before I open my mouth"*. Consequently, Michaela perceives that through her involvement with the family she has become *"a better person"*.

To Michaela, teaching appears to offer opportunities to establish rewarding relationships, for as she pointed out *"I find I can be closer to children than adults"*. She sees herself as a *"loving, kind and caring"* teacher who is *"able to be part of their world"*. She would like children to feel that *"they could talk to me about anything"*, and imagines that one of the

rewards of teaching would be having children *"look up at me, and smile, and put their arms about me"*.

The value Michaela places on relationships with children was apparent when she spoke about her first field visit to a preschool. She described her delight when soon after she arrived at the centre, *"a little girl came over and talked to me, and then another came over and talked, and then another"*. The children's ready acceptance of her reinforced Michaela's decision to become an early childhood teacher. In contrast, Michaela seemed unable to establish a relationship with adults in the centre. She found the director *"too busy to talk"*, and the other student teachers *"too thick with each other - they didn't want me around"*. It seems likely that overcoming feelings of isolation and developing self confidence will be an ongoing challenge for Michaela in her "struggle for voice" (Britzman, 1991).

Erica: Relying on the Voices of Others

Received knowing is the term used by Belenky et al. (1986) to describe the perception that learning is a process of absorbing what others have to say. For received knowers, knowledge is an entity which originates outside of the self. Received knowers prefer clarity and predictability, and dislike ambiguity. They tend to "assume that there is only one right answer to each question, and that all other answers and all contrary views are automatically wrong" (p.37). Several student teachers relied primarily on received knowledge during the first part of the year, but gradually moved away from this orientation. However Erica, an articulate and outgoing school leaver, appeared to become increasingly dependent on received knowledge.

Erica has considerable experience teaching children and adults to swim, a role she finds immensely rewarding: *"It's unreal! I get the biggest buzz out of teaching swimming"*. It is also a challenge: *"I have to think to myself 'Now hang on, this person has no idea what I'm talking about - no idea of the concept. I have to work out how I can teach it"*. She explained further: *"I was teaching a stroke correction class. One man had a problem - he couldn't float. I couldn't understand it, but on Saturday, we worked it out. I know that when I'm swimming my diaphragm is concave because my lungs are filled with air. I feel like I'm pushing up in my diaphragm. So I told him to push up in his diaphragm, and because his lungs were full, he could float!"* Erica believes she has learnt a lot about teaching through experiences like this: *"I'm learning and growing and changing the whole time I am teaching swimming. I'm always trying new approaches because what works well with one adult, or child, or baby won't work with another"*. Through teaching swimming, Erica has acquired *personal practical knowledge*

of teaching (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). To a large extent, she sees teaching as problem solving, and learning to teach a matter of experience, practice and common sense.

Success as a swimming teacher has given Erica confidence in her ability to teach. She laughed as she commented: *"I could teach now - no worries, as far as I'm concerned! At least I think could, although Lecturer X probably wouldn't think so!"* Consequently, Erica finds her difficulties with the theoretical aspects of the program extremely frustrating. She commented: *"I'm working so hard, but I've already failed one course. I don't understand what I'm doing wrong. It's just like I'm beating my head against a brick wall".* Erica acknowledges that theoretical understanding is important: *"I know that I've still got a lot to learn. I've probably got blinkers on my eyes at the moment, and don't quite realise just how much there is to learn"*, but emphasised *"I don't like the theory ... I don't like learning it ... I don't like being tested ... I hate being marked on assignments ... It's not my strong point"*. To Erica, her strength is her proven practical ability, and she finds it exceedingly frustrating that the voice of authority appears not to take account of this.

Perhaps perceiving that her expertise gained through teaching swimming would be discounted in someway, Erica was surprisingly anxious about her practicum: *"I'm really scared about it! I'm scared I'm going to do it all wrong".* In fact, her practicum was very successful and rewarding: *"I was learning all the time - about children, about the job, about better ways to do things".* Erica even found herself enjoying the recording associated with her teaching: *"I actually enjoyed the written work I did during the prac. But as I was writing I was thinking Lecturer X is going to write 'Wrong! Wrong! Wrong!' all the way through it"*. Despite her evident success, the voice of authority, which she assumed would be critical, remained strong.

Erica was disconcerted, by her tendency to question her interactions with the children: *"Since I've been taught all these things* (communication skills), *I'm questioning the way I interact with children. I always thought that I communicated with children really well (and I know that I do), but now I say to myself 'Is that right? Would I be doing something wrong by saying to that child what I was going to say?"* She appreciates the opportunity to learn new skills: *"It's important that they teach us better ways of attacking situations"*, but is uncomfortable questioning what she has previously taken for granted: *"I don't like the fact that I'm questioning myself so much at the moment. I feel uncomfortable about it all, because I don't know what's right or what's wrong, a lot of the time. I can't act instinctively yet, using the right information that I've been given"*. While Erica can envisage a time when she may be less dependent on the voice of authority, that time has not yet come.

Erica's reliance on an external voice for an interpretation of right and wrong, and her discomfort when faced with ambiguity and uncertainty, suggest that she is primarily reliant on received knowing. It is interesting to speculate about why this is her preferred mode. Possibly this has always been so for Erica. Her comments about teaching swimming, however, suggest a confidence in her own voice which is lacking when she talks about her experiences in the program. This feeling of confidence reappears briefly when Erica talked about how valuable she found the opportunity to work as a member of a team during her practicum: *"I didn't even think of myself as a student while I was there; I was just part of the team, and I actually did a lot more than was required"*. Perhaps Erica's difficulties with the theoretical components of the program have forced her to adopt the mode of received knowing. If this is the case, has the program, in effect disempowered Erica in her role as a learner?

Marina, Heather, Jessica: Listening to the Inner Voice

Belenky et al. (1986) refer to listening to one's inner voice as *subjective knowing*. Subjective knowing involves a growing sense of inner strength, and greater awareness of personal knowledge. Such knowledge is often intuitive, and therefore difficult to articulate beyond *"it feels right"* or *"I just know"*. Consequently, there can be a tendency to resist alternative views which don't co-incide with *"gut feelings"*. Subjective knowers emphasise the importance of personal experience and may discount the value of theory. This mode of knowing can be more empowering than received knowledge because it is characterised by a shift away from overwhelming reliance on external authorities. However, given the Western tendency to devalue subjective knowing, it is not particularly empowering in the public domain.

While a number of student teachers alluded to the importance of subjective knowing, it was difficult to say whether any of them relied primarily on this form of knowing. Three student teachers, all school leavers, are profiled in this section. All three have a different orientation to subjective knowing. For Marina, subjective knowing seemed, in part, a means of escape from academic demands; for Heather it seemed linked to a determination to hold on to strong personal beliefs; and for Jessica, it seemed a matter of establishing an inner balance.

Marina

Marina, like Erica, became increasingly frustrated about the theoretical components of the program. However, unlike Erica who seemed to become more dependent on received knowledge as her anxiety increased, Marina reacted by becoming more subjective in her orientation. This shift seemed based, at least in part, on exasperation. For example, she commented: *"Piaget, Froebel, Rousseau, Montessori ... I just think there's no point to it. I*

suppose it's good to have a background knowledge, but there is no way I'm going to relate to it and follow it. You work out your own theory". Marina did not elaborate on how she might do this, or what her theory might be. Similarly, although Marina found that maintaining a practicum folder was helpful in some respects she felt that much of the recording expected of her was unnecessary. She explained: *"If you know how to do something, then I don't see why you have to write it down".* In some respects, therefore, Marina's shift towards subjective knowing may have been a defensive response to the demands of the program.

Heather

In contrast to Erica and Marina, Heather was comfortable about her grasp of theoretical constructs. She was uncomfortable, however, with several of the views expressed by lecturers. For example, she referred several times to what she saw as an annoying tendency for lecturers to over-emphasise the vulnerability of young children. She commented: *"At the beginning of the year when we first started learning about teacher interaction, I tended to think 'Oh, what if I ruin these kids because of how I treat them!', but then I realised that was ridiculous".* Later, she returned to this theme: *"This profession tends to treat children as if teachers might destroy them if you say or do the wrong thing. I don't like the "We've got to be so careful attitude".* In contrast, Heather believes: *"You shouldn't treat children as if they are very fragile. They are very resilient. They bounce back, and a lot of things are like water off a duck's back".* The conviction with which Heather maintained this belief, even though it conflicted with the beliefs of her lecturers, suggests a confidence in her inner voice.

Jessica

Jessica's style of subjective knowing was characterised by a quiet insistence on finding her own way. Jessica was guided by what she perceived as an internal sense of balance. She described her practicum mainly in terms of balance - between having fun and learning; taking initiative without upsetting routines; balancing her needs with the children's needs; and balancing the different ideas she was exposed to with her own values. Although Jessica ultimately relied on her sense of balance, she actively sought others' views. She appreciated that her cooperating teacher had *"some different ideas that I hadn't come across before"* and made a point of *"raising these issues in tutorials because I wanted to touch out on what other people thought".* Jessica's interest in others' views suggests movement beyond subjective knowledge towards connected knowledge.

A move away from subjective knowledge signifies an awareness of inherent complexity and a realisation that knowledge is rarely accessible immediately. Knowledge is seen as a process rather than an entity. Because procedures for accessing and generating knowledge become important, Belenky et al. (1986) refer to this perspective as *procedural knowledge*. They describe two general orientations - *separate* and *connected* knowing. *Separate* knowing relies on the construction of logical argument and objective reasoning to gain mastery over that which one seeks to understand. In contrast, *connected* knowing focuses on developing skills for accessing others' knowledge. It is based on a desire to understand other perspectives, even though they may seem uncomfortable or alien. Of the student teachers in the study who are developing a procedural stance, most tend towards connected knowing. Genni, however, seems more oriented towards separate knowing.

Genni: Separate knowing

Genni is in her early twenties and has an Associate Diploma in an area unrelated to early childhood education. Frequently, Genni finds she is called upon to justify her change in career direction and to defend her decision to become an early childhood teacher. This pressure may account for the emphasis she places on developing skills of logical argument, explanation and analysis.

Genni finds it difficult to be as articulate as she would like. In part, this is because her ideas are still developing. While she is aware of the centrality of concepts *such as child-centredness* and *developmentally appropriate practice*, to early childhood education, she is unclear about their meaning: *"I'm really confused about what this child centredness thing is, as opposed to just caring for children. I can't seem to get a grip on that concept, and that really bugs me"*. Her difficulties are also due to the circumstances in which she is asked to defend her career choice, often to interested customers in the supermarket in which she works. Sometimes she gives up trying to explain: *"I end up just trying to get their groceries though as quickly as possible, so they'll leave me alone"*. Even with interested friends, however, Genni finds it difficult to counter the assumption that she is *"spending four years leaning how to watch children play"*. Essentially, Genni feels that because of society's general lack of respect for young children, it will always be difficult for her to justify her decision to become an early childhood teacher. While she has accepted this, she is determined to learn to articulate her beliefs in a way which will engender more respect for her decision. She sees that the best way to do this is to cultivate the voice of reasoned explanation and argument.

Sarah: Connected Knowing

Sarah, a school leaver, has wanted to be an early childhood teacher for as long as she can remember. She entered the program with a clear image of herself as a teacher, and looked forward to providing children with the types of activities, she recalls enjoying herself as a child. Sarah has found many of her ideas challenged: *"You learn so many different things about what not to do ... We've been told that it's not good to draw pictures for the kids to colour in... and we've been taught to think that we shouldn't use stencils."* As these injunctures contradicted an image of teaching which she had held dearly, Sarah's reaction was interesting. Initially overwhelmed by the voice of authority, she commented: *"I'm scared of saying some things in tutorials now"*, and *"I wouldn't be game to hand out stencils because we are constantly being told that we shouldn't do it"*. While acknowledging, however, that she would *"like the security of knowing I'm doing the right thing"*, she began to question her lecturers' views. At the same time, she questioned her own views. Eventually, through a process she described as *"very puzzling and confusing"* she was able to reconcile the conflicting perspectives by deciding that appropriateness depended upon context.

Sarah explored the appropriateness of teaching through themes, another of her original images of teaching, in a similar manner. Her original enthusiasm was tempered when she saw the adverse impact on the children of a theme-based curriculum in the preschool where she undertook her first practicum. She discussed the issue with her cooperating teacher, and concluded that under certain conditions, providing a number of conditions were met, themes could be appropriate. She commented: *"This style of teaching like any other seems to have its good points and bad points. I believe it is important to adopt its positive aspects, and adapt the negative ones"*. Sarah continued to face challenges to her original beliefs about teaching. In the process of resolving each challenge she explored a range of perspectives on different issues, and became more able to understand why people held different views. In doing so, she became aware of *"building up my own value system that I didn't realise I had"*. As Sarah became more conscious of her own value system, she worried about whether she would be expected *"to conform to certain ideas that I don't necessarily agree with"* in future practicums. She commented: *"This makes me question whether student teachers really teach the way they would if they had their own class, or whether they teach the way they think they will pass"* - an important issue for those interested in student teacher empowerment.

Colin: Integrating the Voices

Belenky et al. (1986) call integrating the voices of external authority, inner self and reason, *constructed knowing*. Constructed knowledge constitutes a weaving together of strands of

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knowledge and a range of voices into a recognisably unique, authentic and passionate voice. It involves "a capacity for speaking with and listening to others while simultaneously speaking and listening to the self" (p.145). Essentially, those who construct knowledge "understand that answers to all questions vary depending on the context in which they are asked and on the frame of reference of the person doing the asking" (p.138). Colin appeared more orientated to constructed knowing than other student teachers in the study.

By the time he entered the program in his early twenties, Colin had completed two years of a secondary teacher education course. He decided to change from secondary to early childhood education because he was uncomfortable with the atmosphere of power and control he experienced in high schools. He believed that working with young children would allow him the opportunity to create a liberal and egalitarian environment where children's needs and individuality were respected.

Colin described himself as an idealist with *"passionate"* beliefs about education. He saw his beliefs stemming from his own school experiences, and explained: *"As a child, I always wanted to question things, but in a Catholic school you were not supposed to question, so I was always getting into trouble for asking questions ... for questioning what is right and what is wrong"*. Colin commented that as a result: *"I learnt to educate myself. I love learning. I'd love to give that love of learning to kids - to me that's the whole purpose of education"*. For Colin, education is ultimately about empowerment: *"I truly believe that being a teacher means being in a position to empower children. I believe there is no point in teaching if you are not going to empower children. To me, that is paramount"*. Although warned by his friends that *"they don't like people like me in education because we might rock the boat"*, Colin was hopeful that he would not become *"demoralised"* and that he "*would be able to get out there and really make a difference"*.

Initially, Colin was pleased he had changed to early childhood, for he felt very comfortable with the early childhood philosophy. He explained: *This degree deals with getting to know the children, and what the children need, and I guess that's what I was looking for"*. However, he began to feel increasingly isolated, which he attributed in part to being male in *"a female bastion of academia ... In lectures, the academics still refer to 'all you girls' - What about me, and the four other males in first year?"* Mostly however, his isolation stemmed from a perception that his learning style and general outlook was different from the other students, and not appreciated by some lecturers.

Colin described how for him learning was: *"a matter of holding onto your beliefs, and connecting them with the knowledge you're taught at university"*. He emphasised the

importance of connections, and explained: *"I see them in my mind, almost alike a concept map, with my beliefs in the middle"*. One of the ways Colin made connections was through questioning, and he sensed that his emphasis on questioning made him different from the other students. He commented: *"I do question what I'm told ... I believe that it's a matter for us as students to question what it is that we are being taught"*. For this reason, he did not rely on prescribed readings. He commented: *"I listen, and if there is an aspect I have questions about, then I'll read different views about that issue ... That's the way I work"*. Colin was concerned by what he saw as a tendency for other student teachers *"to fall into the trap of believing everything they are told by academics"*. He was even more concerned by his perception that some lecturers discouraged student teachers from questioning the theoretical underpinnings of the program.

Colin valued exposure to as wide a range of views as possible and was disturbed by his perception that some lecturers sought to shape student teachers' views by limiting their exposure to theorists who did not conform to the program's philosophy. He commented: *"It's as if different theories are pushed under the carpet, or wiped off the slate"*. Colin continued: *"For example, my tutor was absolutely damning about Montessori, and I thought that was outrageous. Although Montessori doesn't fit the Institute's ideology, surely as someone who has made such a huge impact on early childhood education, she deserves some sort of reflection on what she imparted to the field"*. Because of his emphasis on questioning as a basis for making connections and constructing knowledge, and the apparent tendency of the program to discourage this, Colin felt frustrated and disempowered.

The above profiles indicate the range of the student teachers' epistemological perspectives. It should be noted however, that while the student teachers' predominant *modes of knowing* are described, this does not imply that these were *fixed* modes. Colin, for example, characteristically adopted a constructed mode of knowing, but reverted to received knowing during stressful moments associated with practicum. Similarly, Jessica, while primarily subjective, also showed signs of connected and constructed knowing. As Belenky et al. (1986) emphasise, these conceptual categories are not intended to be definitive, but rather a starting point for discussion.

DISCUSSION

The voices of these student teachers tell something of their experience of the first year of their preservice program. They reveal much about themselves, as people and as learners.

They also reveal a considerable amount about teacher educators and teacher education programs. Indeed, the voices of student teachers provide a mirror for teacher educators who seek insights into their practice, and ways of improving preservice programs. What can teacher educators learn by stilling their own voices and listening to the voices of student teachers?

Above all, the voices of student teachers highlight their individuality. As the above profiles show, the student teachers in this study vary enormously in the extent to which they perceive they are able to take responsibility for their learning, and their confidence and experience in doing so. In short, they vary in the extent to which they are empowered as learners. There seems no reason to think that this group of student teachers is atypical, which suggests that any tendency to see student teachers as an homogenous group is inappropriate.

Yet, given the constraints of large class sizes and pressure on teacher educators to increase time spent on research at the expense of teaching, is it possible for preservice programs to recognise and cater for individual needs? Lincoln (cited by Beld, 1994) claims that inevitably all programs, regardless of nature, are flawed because their designers eroneously assume (a) that they know what is best for people, and (b) that the participants' experiences are sufficiently similar that the same steps within the program can get them to a common end. Few teacher educators are likely to accept Lincoln's view. Indeed, underlying recent changes to teacher education programs is a belief that it is possible to provide programs which better meet the needs of student teachers (eg. Clandinin et al, 1993).

Frequently, however, it is unclear as to whether these needs are recognised as individual or assumed to be common to all student teachers. Traditionally, early childhood educators are commited to the care and support of individual learners. It would be unfortunate if such commitment did not extend to early childhood teacher education. Yet commitment, alone, may be insufficient to overcome the constraints.

It seems that if teacher educators are to cater more effectively for the differing needs of student teachers within a university context, the nature of teaching and learning must be reconceptualised (Hollingsworth, 1994). Despite the changes which have been taking place in teacher education programs, the oft-asked question "How can I teach these student teachers everything they need to know?" suggests that many teacher educators may still be more comfortable with the notion of received knowledge underpinning traditional programs (Hollingsworth, 1994). Their commitment to passing on to student teachers the knowledge and skills they see as essential for effective teaching (Heron, 1992; Britzman,

1991) makes it difficult for them to ask the more appropriate question, *"What is the impact of my teaching on their learning?* (Hollingsworth, 1994).

Received knowledge may also be a comfortable perspective for many student teachers, particularly if their previous experiences in the educational system have led them to see themselves as dependent, rather than autonomous learners (Heron, 1992). Received knowledge tends to be particularly comfortable in the context of uncertainty and new situations (Hogan & Clandinin, 1993). In the light of the well documented uncertainty surrounding practicum, especially for beginning student teachers, perhaps it is unrealistic to expect them to move beyond their typical interest in "quick fixes and tricks of the trade" (Kagan, 1992, p.162).

An additional complexity is that ultimately teacher educators retain the "gate keeping" function for the teaching profession (Calderhead & Gates, 1993), and as such, need to be confident of student teachers' knowledge and skills. Traditionally they have also performed a socialization function, if somewhat overzealously (Battersby, 1989). Even if, like Hollingsworth (1994), one accepts that the boundaries of teacher educators' responsibilities have changed, so that there is now less responsibility for teaching specific low level technical skills, and increased responsibility for fostering the development of autonomous and reflective professionals, how does one find an appropriate balance?

While there can be no simple answer, one possibility is to focus on developing a climate of learning in teacher education programs that encourages the development of student teachers' confidence in themselves as learners and empowers them as learners (Hollingsworth, 1994). Ideally such a climate would constitute a balance of nurture and dynamic tension in which student teachers could evolve at their own pace, rather than to predetermined arbitrary expectations, in a supportive atmosphere which encourages risk taking and emphasises growth.

In such a climate, validation of personal experiences would be important, and there would be recognition that emerging thoughts are likely to be tentative (Belenky et al., 1986). Student teachers would need to feel that they would be listened to, and listened to non-judgmentally (Poirer, 1992). Teacher educators would have to resist the temptation to rush into abstractions as premature pressure to master theoretical concepts may inhibit development (Belenky et al.). At the same time, student teachers would be encouraged to accept that some discomfort and confusion is inherent to development (Hollingsworth, 1994; Kagan, 1992).

Developing a climate of learning and empowerment of this nature would necessitate further change to current programs. Possible changes might include a movement away from the traditional lecture and tutorial mode of delivery; flexible options for progression; and reconceptualisation of assessment practices so that maturation of ideas and learning from experience could be acknowledged. More attention might be given to the process, rather than the content of learning, and opportunities for risk-taking and negotiation would need to be explored. Ideally, teaching strategies would take account of student teachers' epistemological perspectives and would focus on encouraging student teachers to make

epistemological transitions. Such changes would necessitate a much greater commitment to understanding more about student teacher development, and to an exploration ways in which student teachers might be helped to integrate intuitive, practical and theoretical knowledge.

CONCLUSION

In order for student teachers to become empowered, their voices must be heard. Yet simply listening to their voices will achieve little. Teacher educators must be prepared to reconsider their practices in the light of what student teachers are saying. This is likely to lead to considerable soul searching amongst teacher educators as they reconceptualise their roles and expectations. Unless teacher educators are prepared to do this, however, there is little likelihood that recent changes to preservice programs will lead to the development of more autonomous, empowered and reflective student teachers more able to cope with the complexities of teaching.

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